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Thesis: UNDERCURRENTS

Exegesis: MULTIPLICITY: A CRITICAL FRAMEWORK AND
UNDERLYING THEME

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Attestation of Authorship

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgments), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.”

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CHRISTY BURROWS

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I would like also to acknowledge the influence of the 99% Invisible podcast on some of the arcane facts and stories from history presented in the creative thesis.

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This research project did not involve human participants or any other potentially contentious elements, and as such did not require approval from the AUT Ethics Committee (AUTEK).

Abstract

Undercurrents is composed of a creative work (contemporary novel) and a critical work (exegesis). The thesis follows three students through their final year of high school: Cam, Jacob and Melissa, who share the text's narration as equal protagonists. Throughout the course of the narrative, each protagonist encounters multi-faceted challenges to their preconceived understandings of their identity. The thesis could, in this sense, be considered a Young Adult (YA) 'coming of age' narrative.

The thesis' complex mode of engagement with genre and demographic expectations of YA highlights the increasing fluidity of the boundaries between YA and contemporary adult fiction. The exegesis accompanying this thesis examines some of the evolving trends in YA's genre and demographic to contextualise the liminal space between genres that this thesis occupies.

Aspects of the text's form also contribute to its liminality. For example, focalising the text between three different characters invites the reader to interpret key narrative events through the individual subjectivities of each narrator, in turn encouraging the reader to question the singularity of narrative truth. Along with multiplicity of focalisation, the text also experiments with flashbacks and scene replays through different characters' perspectives. These non-linear methods of narration deliberately disorientate the reader's sense of the boundary between past and present, exploring multiplicity of time and space in the narrative world.

Multiplicity becomes a key term through which to examine the form of the creative text and its critical context. The specific methods through which the thesis accesses multiplicity are explored in detail in the exegesis.

Exegesis

MULTIPLICITY: A CRITICAL FRAMEWORK AND UNDERLYING THEME

12,622 words

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Introduction

Multiplicity is a key term through which to analyse both this exegesis and the creative text. For the purpose of this discussion, multiplicity can be defined as “the quality or state of being multiple or various” (Merriam-Webster, 2020). Useful synonyms include the notion of the manifold (having many different forms or elements), or multiplex (many elements in a complex relationship) (Lexico, 2020).

Several aspects of the thesis will be examined to consider its engagement with the notion of multiplicity. Firstly, the exegesis will locate the thesis’ relationship to various Young Adult (YA) trends in genre and demographic, and also consider how the thesis engages associated expectations of ‘coming of age’ narratives. Following an exploration of the text’s genre and demographic, the exegesis will explore the text’s multi-faceted engagement with relevant socio-political concerns, theoretical underpinnings and narrative setting. The final portion of the exegesis will examine how the text accesses multiplicity through its intra-textual features, such as form, focalisation, and a range of stylistic features, such as imagery and symbolism.

Intentions of this exegesis in relation to the creative thesis

While the exegesis explores a range of genres that the text could potentially inhabit, including YA and contemporary adult fiction, the exegesis does not intend to definitively determine the creative thesis’ genre or its potential demographic. The text deliberately occupies liminal space to test the fluidity of these genre and demographic expectations.

This exegesis also avoids identifying the thesis with the ‘New Adult’ genre or demographic as a solution to the text’s fluctuation between definitions of YA and contemporary adult fiction. The age of this thesis’ protagonists does not align to typical expectations of New Adult fiction (usually featuring protagonists between 18-25) or its conventional themes. New Adult fiction also tends to focus on the ‘what now’ of reaching adulthood in its subject matter (Naughton, 2014), whereas this thesis is concerned with the burgeoning awareness of identity as a concept for these adolescent protagonists, and their subsequent beginning process of identity formation, than the stages they may undertake after adolescence to solidify a place in the adult world.

Additionally, while the exegesis refers to several psychological / philosophical concepts in its discussion, such as adolescent psychology, gender performativity and

Derrida's concept of hauntology, these explorations are intended in the context of creative narrative and character development rather than in the context of their respective disciplines / origins.

1 Genre and demographic multiplicity

Who is the 'ideal reader' of this text?

The first area of discussion on genre relates to defining expectations of Young Adult (YA) as a genre, in order to examine this text's position both within and potentially outside of these boundaries. On a simple level, YA literature can be defined as literature written for and about adolescents (Garcia, 2013). Crag Hill expands on this definition to position the YA genre as fiction that "immerses readers in the experiences, lived and imagined, of young adults aged 14– 18" (2014, p. 8). Hill also states that "YA narratives across genres enable identification with the narrator and/or encourage empathy for the protagonist and/or other characters... YA literature will also implicitly or explicitly challenge the dominant assumptions contemporary culture conveys to adolescents" (2014, p. 8), more so than writing for children, and in a different way than adult fiction does.

This creative thesis could, on one hand, tend towards assumptions of a traditional YA genre based on these understandings, due to the age of its three narrators (at approximately 17 years of age), and the conflicts that each character experiences, which relate to the challenge of inherited cultural assumptions of identity, in order to reach a new understanding of, or relationship to, the self and society. However, several formal and stylistic features of the text also challenge traditional expectations of the YA genre. The complexity of the text's structure, using three narrative perspectives (in both first and third person voices) and numerous disruptions of linear time, is more in tune with expectations of contemporary adult realist fiction. The text's relative lack of traditional resolution and understated ending is also more in line with realist fiction, whereas in YA literature, the 'coming of age' denouement is traditionally overstated. The text's YA subject matter therefore contradicts its form, enabling the text to potentially inhabit a liminal space between YA fiction and contemporary fiction for adults.

Because the text inhabits genre expectations of both YA and contemporary adult fiction, this text's intended readership and demographic is also likely to be varied. This is in part because adult readers are increasingly enjoying complex YA texts that

use the YA genre to comment on the wider human condition and universal experiences that transcend the specific ages of protagonists (Garcia, 2013, p. xi). A great example of this phenomenon is the cult-like popularity of Matt and Ross Duffer's Netflix series, *Stranger Things* (2016), which offers an adult demographic a nostalgic view of adolescence through the eyes of young protagonists. Cart suggests that this increasingly common 'crossover' space, in which adults absorb texts that would traditionally appeal to a YA demographic, is in part due to increasing economic hardship in a contemporary context that delays the 'coming of age' process, making the YA experience applicable to a broader demographic in their twenties (2016). This example demonstrates how YA fiction, in a contemporary context, has the potential to reach a wider adult demographic as well as appealing to its original YA audience.

It is important to also acknowledge adolescent YA readers' interest and ability in engaging with traditionally 'adult' themes and genres. YA readers often have equal access to texts written for and about adults that demonstrate complex features of form, style, and subject matter. This means that complex stylistic features can also be presented in a YA context without alienating adolescent readers, contributing to the 'crossover space' between YA and contemporary adult fiction for an adolescent demographic. To support this point, Cart examines early critical feedback on M.T. Anderson's epic novel, *Octavian Nothing: Traitor to the Nation*, a text popular with YA readers that eventually won the Printz award (targeted at the YA genre / demographic) despite its complex, eighteenth-century narrative stylisation. Cart believes that early criticisms on the text as 'hard to sell' discounted the potential abilities of the YA audience to engage with complex textual structures and character presentation (2016, p. 86).

Access to YA texts, as well as to contemporary adult fiction, is not inherently relative to the perceived ideal demographic. As a way of conclusion on genre and demographic, this creative thesis could be positioned as a text which straddles the boundaries of both YA and contemporary adult genre and demographic expectations in order to interrogate and expand these, opening a space in which both YA and adult readers can potentially have access to the text. The thesis challenges the existing demographic by housing more complex narrative styles in a recognisable series of tropes, and this increased complexity in the guise of YA text may also appeal to adult readers. Attempts to define the 'ideal reader' or demographic of a text based on genre expectations or textual subject matter have the potential to discount individual readers'

experiences of a text, both in terms of ability to comprehend the narrative (or its interpretation), along with readers' ability to empathise with and relate to the subject matter of the text and its emotional landscape.

Engagement with 'coming of age' themes in the context of YA

As an extension of the discussion on features of the YA genre and its demographic, it is also important to examine the concept of 'coming of age' in YA fiction, and how genre and demographic expectations of 'coming of age' tropes have been defined and challenged through the 20th century, in order to then determine this thesis' position.

Early 1940s and '50 YA texts tended to position 'coming of age' as a feature of adolescence that could be resolved through conformity, with the ultimate outcome of 'coming of age' equating to achieving an adult position in society (Cart, 2016). This is evidenced by some of the examples of popular titles from the 1940s' and '50s in American culture, as compiled by Catherine Ross: *'Boy Trouble'*, *'Girl Trouble'*, *'Prom Trouble'*, *'Teacher Trouble'*, *'Practically Fifteen'*, *'Going on Sixteen'*, *'Almost Seventeen'*, *'A Girl for Michael'*, *'A Boy for Debbie'*, *'A Touchdown for Harold'*, and *'A Horse for Sheila'* (1985, p. 179). These titles signal a lack of character complexity and diversity in early YA genre and readership expectations, where such YA texts were popularised as prescriptive 'morality' tales on how young people should behave rather than complex genre of literature, as YA tends to be regarded today.

In these examples, the age and / or object of desire for the adolescent protagonists is clearly stated, and the lack of representation outside of white, middle class, heteronormative ideals is also apparent. As Cart explains, representation in these early texts was rarely outside of cultural norms or expectations in the first place, which is perhaps one explanation for why conflicts within the text were more simplistic (2016). Few protagonists in these texts "smokes or drinks; drugs are never mentioned; none of the students is gay or lesbian or a gang member. None is emotionally troubled or the victim of abuse. Instead, their biggest concern... is whether to go steady" (2016, p. 17). This lack of diversity in YA protagonists meant that the resolution of a character's 'coming of age' was often an instruction on how young people 'should' behave rather than a movement towards representing diverse identities (Cart, 2016), as

early representations in fiction often guided young readers towards pre-accepted identities based on simplistic goals.

Increasingly, coming of age texts intended for young readers in contemporary contexts preference the notion that these early binary notions of morality are in fact difficult to uphold in the adult world (Cart, 2016). The ‘complication’ of traditional YA beliefs on ‘coming of age’ was in part due to the growing trend in YA fiction towards representation of identities outside of mainstream, normative understandings of identity acceptability, as mentioned above. Ross (1985) describes the early texts of the 1960s that attempted to engage with previously taboo topics in more realist and diverse situations for YA readers as ‘problem novels’. The titles of popular ‘problem novels’ for teens, also compiled by Ross, demonstrate a marked shift from those that were popular in 1940s and ‘50s: *The Outsiders*, *The Pigman*, *I’ll Get There: It Better be Worth the Trip*, *That was Then, this is Now*, *Man without a Face*, *It’s Not the End of the World*, *Dirty Hooker Shoots Smack* and *If I Love You, Am I Trapped Forever?* (1985, p. 17). These titles suggest a questioning of previously held notions of coming of age and a movement away from the simplistic summaries of adolescent identity that characterised early titles. This movement also hints at an evolution of the YA genre in tune with an increasingly diverse and complex modern world that offered enhanced opportunities for non-normative identity representation, and resultant multiplicity of self-definition for young readers. Like these ‘problem novels’, this thesis could also be described as an early form of YA realism (1985). This thesis positions identity formation as an ongoing process into adulthood, with characters that are a ‘work in progress’ at both the text’s beginning and its conclusion.

The ambiguous sense of resolution for each character’s narrative arc at this text’s conclusion is key to this thesis’ more complex positioning of ‘coming of age’, while also acknowledging that in this text, it is the traditional tropes of resolution that are under attack, rather than the issues and concepts being experienced by these young protagonists. For example, the trope-based expectation that Cam will resolve her conflict with her eating disorder through counselling, as may have been the case in traditional iterations of YA problem-solving, is treated as cliché. Jacob reacts to Charlie’s return home with disdain rather than relief, choosing his newfound developing individual identity over his volatile family structure. Melissa casts off societal and familial pressures regarding her conforming heteronormative identity in favour of

honest self-identification. Each of these aspects of identity formation are, in a sense, the beginning of a new relationship to each character's personal rather than a conclusive resolution or coming of age: a growing of awareness of individuality rather than an acceptance of more normative expectations based on tropes of resolution.

To conclude, this creative thesis falls into a more contemporary treatment of 'coming of age' which was popularised in the 1960s and onwards. This text engages both directly and on a meta-textual level with familiar tropes from the 1940s and '50s era of YA, in order to then disrupt their simplistic representation. Diverse characters are not instrumentalised in this text, but instead are treated as an inevitable product of an increasingly complex contemporary society in which identity is constantly under development. Characters in this thesis ultimately support the contemporary trend towards diverse representation of YA identities, based on a movement away from the instructive tales of morality that characterised 1940s and '50s YA.

Representing YA experiences through social realism

As mentioned previously, the thesis could also be considered as a realist representation of contemporary YA experiences, or 'YA realism'. This invites us to consider if the text could be best located in the genre of social realism rather than YA. Like this thesis, where characters are presented as 'works in progress' at its conclusion, social realist texts do not "revel in the sense of an ending... they do draw towards an end but leave much undecided or uncertain" (Eaglestone, 2013, p. 24). Realism in fiction can also be defined as an attempt to represent lived experiences faithfully (Campbell, 2015). The thesis' stylistic choices, including a lack of romantic or fantastical narration (explored later in this exegesis) could also position this thesis as a realist text.

In light of these aspects, perhaps the text could be best framed as a narrative illustration of social realism in a YA context. Ross' term 'YA realism', discussed in the previous section, is an apt term to consolidate these ideas and signpost how the thesis engages with realistic experiences in a YA context (1985).

2 Narrative setting and timeframe

Many critical studies on fiction based in New Zealand focus on the potential of the local landscape to influence one's reading of the narrative (Giffney, 2012). However, because

the inner world of the characters in my text is the crucial ‘battleground’ of conflict, it was important to choose a setting for this text that would not impose on the reading experience or psychology of the characters or reader, but rather, serve as a zone of reflection or meditation on the internal conflicts each character faces. Despite the need for a subtle setting, it was nonetheless important to define both the text’s physical setting and the time period in which it operates to develop a sense of place and space that would align with expectations of social realism in a New Zealand context. My narrative world needed to be convincing in this context, but not imposing enough to influence the narrative action itself. It was also important for the setting to allow scope for developing landscape (and character / landscape relationship) as metaphor / symbolism, or even, as an objective correlative to convey the emotional experiences of characters through setting rather than diegetic storytelling.

Based on these considerations, the text’s imagined local setting is based on Hobsonville, Auckland. Though this setting is not named or stated in the text, it exists on both the conceptual level and in the physical mapping of the places that characters inhabit. This setting allows access to character themes of multiplicity in part because of the diverse history of Hobsonville - first as farmland, then as an area for clay production, then as an airfield and naval base. This chameleon-like identity has recently, on the surface, been subsumed by some of Auckland’s newest developments, identical rows of houses that cover the area like a mask. The ‘sameness’ of the suburb’s present architecture subtly suggests normativity, serving as a pressure-cooker for these characters’ engagement and conflict with conformity and oneness of identity.

However, there is still a rich history and multiplicity beneath Hobsonville’s contemporary overt layer, demonstrated shown by the few heritage houses that remain in Hobsonville (which Melissa and Jacob’s homes are based on), along with the reclaimed history signposted on along the walkways. Notions of concealed or hidden histories / truths reflects the conflicts faced by these text’s characters, allowing the setting to serve as a macrocosm of characters’ microcosmic inner worlds.

The timeframe for the setting was also important to establish. Although it is also not stated in the text, the novel is implicitly located in a period where phones and technology are an available avenue of communication, yet do not entirely replace in-person interaction, as this text is not intended as a social commentary on technology use by young people in the present day. It would be useful to think of the time period as early 2000s,

where characters have similar social experiences and histories as present-day readers and access to mobile phones for texting and calling, but technology does not feature as a theme on the level of the text.

3 Socio-political and thematic features of the text

This text engages with several aspects of theme grounded in relevant socio-political discussion. Exploration of how the text approaches these ideas is useful for understanding both what the text intends to convey, and what it attempts to challenge, when exploring these features.

Establishment and development of multi-faceted character psychologies

YA characters and their narrative worlds are often motivated by the concept of being ‘in progress’. My creative thesis is true to this understanding of adolescence, portraying characters with rapidly changing and inconsistent psychological narratives in comparison to adult-age protagonists. This volatile age group more overtly allows the text to explore psychology and personality as aspects of character fluidity, particularly in terms of whether these features of identity are fixed early in life, or can change and multiply based on experiences, relationships, and conflicts with previously held beliefs.

To develop complex characters that could interrogate these ideas, a key aim of my early approach to the text was to begin to develop a holistic perspective on the psychology of my characters for interrogation and exposition in the thesis. Developing a robust subconscious presence for these YA characters enabled the thesis to support their movement away from simplistic YA story tropes.

A method used to understand and develop convincing character psychology involved engagement with Darian Smith’s *The Psychology Workbook for Writers* (2015). Exercises involved placing primary characters in a range of experiences to explore the early lessons they learned about their identities, and the role of key relationships in their lives. As part of this process, I developed a worksheet for each key character with questions and responses on their past / present psychological states, conscious and unconscious. Questions were usually internally motivated:

“What does this character hide from themselves, from those close to them, from the world in general?”

What do the things they hide reveal about them to the reader, based on how the things they hide are often their deepest fears / vulnerabilities?" (Smith, 2015)

These background threads do not always feature in the overt narrative of the text, but were crucial in allowing the development of convincing psychologies in the thesis, and the presentation of characters' multifaceted layers of protection developed from past experiences, bearing in mind that a subconscious level of action exists for all fictional characters.

LGBTQIA+ identity formation and 'coming out' in a social realist text

Some contemporary YA texts treat diverse sexualities as a given, in the sense that LGBTQIA+ characters do not need to express or declare their sexuality under a microscope using the 'coming out' trope within a narrative (Corbett, 2019). YA texts that move away from this narrative tend to fall into the genres including fantasy, sci-fi or dystopia. In these genres, in which the usual 'rules' or structures of society are frequently experimented with as a narrative expectation, the social discourse of representing LGBTQIA+ characters is one step removed from the pressures of realism.

Because this thesis is a social realist text, the notion of 'coming out' and coming to terms with an identity outside of heteronormativity is still a crucial feature of identity formation for characters in this narrative context. Despite this necessity, it was important to achieve a balance between presenting the conflicts of 'coming out' faithfully within the story world without placing sexuality as a singular defining feature of characters' identity, to reflect this novel's contemporary YA positioning and the text's underlying theme of multiplicity. This thesis intends representation rather than reductivism, perhaps suggesting that avoiding the primatising of sexuality while still enabling its faithful representation based on individual character experiences is a key method of exploring sexuality through a truly contemporary realist lens.

Trends in LGBTQIA+ representation signal why this is crucial in the thesis' contemporary context. Historically, early LGBTQIA+ -themed social realist novels trended towards representation where LGBTQIA+ identify itself was a plot feature to drive conflict, defined and at times admonished from the outside by heteronormative expectations, rather than one aspect of a holistic character with a wider range of experiences, identities and emotions (Tribunella, 2018). Either this, or realist novels were

often set in a context immediately related to LGBTQIA+ identity, such as an important socio-political event, or a series of conflicts relating to LGBTQIA+ identity because of societal pressures, or a coverage of how societies (usually at a distinct point in ‘sociological time’) impact upon LGBTQIA+ identity.

Patricia Highsmith’s *The Price of Salt* (later reprinted as *Carol*), is an example of a text that engages with these social pressures on LGBTQIA+ identity (2011). This text was published by Highsmith in 1952 under a pseudonym due to the social pressures and legal implications of representing identities outside of heteronormativity during this time, Highsmith centres this queer love story around one of the main characters, Carol, and the social and legal pressures she faces regarding her sexuality, which are central to the action of the plot, allowing the text to serve as a socio-political commentary of the pressures Highsmith’s society could place on non-normative sexualities.

Rather than continuing this trend of realist fiction, the climactic scenes of this novel do not centre on the reactions of Cam and Melissa ‘s friends and family to their sexualities, but more so on their own experiences of feelings they navigate on a personal basis. The novel concludes with only Cam and Melissa present in the scene, narrated from Cam’s perspective:

The spring blossoms were so pink against the sky that it hurt my eyes. The sky too had changed, from endless pale white to a hopeful blue. I looked at her lips held tight together with words, and leaned next to her to brush the edge of my palm against her wrist... My stomach squirmed again. Louise would tell me this is what excitement feels like, although I often get it mixed up with fear. When I let the feeling stay inside of me, something bold stirred too, like wings spreading at the open door of a cage, poised to take flight.

Cam and Melissa understand their sexualities in relation to one another rather than to the world as a whole, privatising their experience. Sexuality is therefore positioned as an individual navigation rather than as a socio-political commentary on societal conflicts regarding sexuality.

Melissa’s engagement with performative femininity

Of the text’s three narrators, Melissa most overtly engages with notions of gender performativity, which, in her case, carries traces of parental and cultural influence. This

is evident from her very first focalisation in the text, where she considers what she will wear for her first day of school and how she will behave with others to secure a well-versed and conforming position of popularity at her new school, serving as something of a ‘before’ with regards to her interrogation of her identity.

The discussion could here turn to an analysis of Judith Butler’s writings on gender performativity to understand how Melissa both engages with and expands feminine enactment. Butler theorises that gender construction has a strong cultural underpinning, inherited and inscribed through generations so that the body enacts a set of cultural meanings that apply to external presentations of gender more so than internal identities. (Butler, 2007). Melissa certainly enacts this concept of inherited behaviour based on the conventional expectations of her femininity that she receives from her parents. However, Butler challenges us to also consider how generations may become an active participants in multifaceted gender construction rather than passive receivers of cultural norms (Butler, 2007). To enable this exploration of the boundary between inheritance and expansion, it was important to retain Melissa’ enacted behaviour as part of her character, in order to place this in conversation with her growing internal sense of agency over her femininity. Her conversations with Cam signpost this conflict, when she explains her feeling of acting a part:

“Always laughing, always happy, always normal. Sometimes when I get to be alone for a few minutes, I feel like the biggest liar of them all. My mother buys me all these clothes, you know. She never asks me what I feel like wearing.”

Because Melissa’s character is part of a creative text, it is important that she is not represented in the text as a case study to serve a wider theoretical argument; despite evoking these concepts, her character is not bound to resolve them. Rather, Melissa occupies a fictional space as a complex character who engages with this construct through her individual experiences. The duality that she grows to inhabit between external enactment and her internal authenticity is another example of how identity awareness enables multiplicity of self-definition.

Opening a space for multiplicity in an eating disorder narrative

Sensitivity and a non-didactic approach to the representation of an eating disorder is crucial, especially given this text’s potential for a younger readership and the status of a

range of forms of eating disorders as recognised mental illnesses on the current Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) (Roller, 2015). Although the representation of an eating disorder in this narrative is extremely subtle, its shrouded mode of narration is based on deliberate ambitions. The first idea explored in this section is how the narrative conveys the potential for multiplicity of identity in the context of an eating disorder narrative, a space in which characters can sometimes suffer reductivism. The second area discussed is the rationale for the text's intentionally encoded rendering of Cam's eating disorder, with most of her experiences of the disorder shrouded in metaphor and symbolism rather than taking place more overtly in the text's primary narrative space.

Regarding the positioning of Cam's eating disorder as one aspect of her diverse and realistic identity, it is useful to examine examples of popular eating disorder narratives. A key example is Portia DeRossi's *Unbearable Lightness: A Story of Loss and Gain* (2010). While DeRossi's story was ground-breaking in its context, the nature of the text's autobiographical style and linear narrative experience of the disorder (albeit with use of relevant flashbacks) places DeRossi's eating disorder as a defining feature of her identity. Instead of placing Cam's eating disorder as her defining narrative topic, requiring resolution, this thesis aims to position Cam as a multifaceted character who also struggles with her identification with her eating disorder alongside numerous other challenges and conflicts. This steers her character arc away from a linear journey of overcoming the disorder, open the space for multi-faceted representation of her identity. *Unbearable Lightness* also takes place in the context of celebrity, which has an underlying edge of 'unreality' that contributes to a sense of the text as taking place outside of realism. This thesis instead places Cam's experience in a social realist context, offering young readers the opportunity to explore how this experience might play out in a context closer to home.

Another recent YA narrative that explores the protagonist's experience of an eating disorder is the 2017 Netflix film, *To the Bone* (Noxon, 2017). We meet the protagonist of this film, Ellen, as she enters a rehabilitation programme designed to cure her anorexia. The film externalises the symptoms of an eating disorder, using quantifiable features such as calorie intake, food consumption, and figures on a scale, as plot devices to inspire a sense of shock / thrill in the reader, focusing on the threat to mortality and aligns the text to the tropes of a 'quest narrative' or suspense narrative.

This form of narration posits that eating disorders are defined only by extreme physical unhealth rather than the pervasive internal thought patterns which inform and lead to these external symptoms. Critics of the film suggests that this portrayal fell victim to the voyeurism that tends to characterise the majority of popular eating disorder narratives (Freeman, 2017). Instead of through quantifiable physical features, Cam accesses her relationship with her eating disorder through symbolism and imagery (explored in detail later in the exegesis), allowing us to chart her struggles or progress through nuanced experiences that focus on the changes in her psyche. This approach is more aligned with Dana Lise Shavin's similar methods in *The Body Tourist* (2014).

This brings this discussion to its second key point, regarding the intentionally encoded representation of Cam's experience in symbolism, imagery and subtext. At no time in this text does Cam overtly acknowledge her experience of her eating disorder on the didactic level, nor do other characters in the text. Due to this hidden positioning, which is a deliberate strategy of representation, the text could be criticised of minimising the experience of an eating disorder, as it is possible that readers could journey through this text and entirely miss Cam's experience of her disorder. However, the very nature of this 'visible invisibility' is central to the text's realistic representation of how eating disorders can be experienced in a contemporary context.

In a study conducted in 2012 in the USA, a combined prevalence of 13.1% of sample size of 500 adolescent females met the symptoms for diagnosis with recognised eating disorder on the DSM-5 framework (A Stice, 2013, p. 445). More than 10% of the general female population in the UK also meet this criteria (Montgomery, 2015), along with a significant portion of the male population.

Despite the significant prevalence of eating disorders in the general population, particularly at adolescence, representations of eating disorders in fiction are still in their infancy. Danielle Montgomery suggests that the longstanding impact of eating disorders on both their sufferers and support network as a part of what might make eating disorders difficult to acknowledge or represent. As she summarises in her blog for the United Kingdom's National Eating Disorder Awareness week, "Why upset our family with tales of woe that they helped to write but could never fix?" (2015). Cam's hidden experience in the text, characterised by secrecy and shame, is not intended as a statement on how representation of eating disorders *should* be, but rather, a reflection of how they often are: an illustrative portrayal rather than an instructive one. Her narrative

representation is instead a prompt to begin the discussion on how we may challenge and evolve our modes of engagement with eating disorders in both society and in fiction.

Derrida's concept of hauntology as a thematic undertone

In the same way that Cam's eating disorder will inevitably involve steps forward as well as regression, often disturbing linear time or progress, Jacob's enactment of trauma in relation to his brother's disappearance reflects Jacques Derrida's concept of hauntological experiences of time in fiction. In the context of this discussion, hauntology can be defined as follows:

Our "here and now", our material presence, is never stripped, bare or alone. Neither is our subjectivity. We are always caught up in invisible and intangible webs of the past, of the Other, of the future, of death. Our existence is therefore always in-between, defined of course by the materiality of our present being, but also by this immaterial flux that surrounds and situates us (Loevlie, 2013, p. 1).

Hauntology is a useful framework for considering how characters in this text, particularly Jacob, carry echoes of their previous experiences into their interactions with the world and its characters into the present moment, blurring the boundary between past and present, and imagined memory and fact. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (2014) is an example of how hauntology can be used in a narrative structure to symbolise how painful and traumatic memories can haunt the present, and vice-versa (Loevlie, 2013). Hauntology's role in social realist fiction therefore also operates as an 'echo' of the psychology of traumatic experiences, showing the potential for social realist fiction to mirror lived experiences.

Charlie's overdose took place in linear time before the beginning of the text, but is only revealed to the reader part way through Jacob's narrative. Jacob's focalisation makes use of a non-linear structure to enable him to process Charlie's drug addiction and overdose, and in a wider sense, the impact of his family structure on his identity. This 'flexing' of time draws attention to hauntological experiences of memory, further developing an argument for multiplicity by blurring Jacob's experience of the past and the present into one.

In turn, the reader's experience of Jacob's narration also becomes hauntological. After the revelation of Charlie's absence, the reader is invited to retrospectively

re-examine and re-imagine their perception of Jacob's character through the first half of the novel based on this new knowledge. The retrospective reconstruction of Jacob's psyche and motives adds an additional layer to the hauntological dimension of Jacob's narrative.

Hauntology is also reflected on the imagistic level of the text. Charlie is often signified by his absence, as if a ghost, reconstructed through Jacob's memories of the past rather than being an active feature of Jacob's present reality. Jacob is often fighting the absent energies of archetypal father / son imagery, and tangibly narrates these missing presences through echoing rooms, signifying his attempt to evoke imagined connections with absent figures. Henry's howls often echo around the empty house: a literal reverberation of Charlie's absence again and again:

Henry was howling again. In the deepest part of the night, when the moon was brightest and revealed the most under its pallid light. He sat at the door and looked at the moon, and the howls would reverberate around the empty kitchen, floorboards shining with all the secret dead things...

The ways in which both characters and readers experience non-linear time in this narrative affirms Derrida's concept of the past as being inextricably linked with the present, future, and even the 'future past': a concept which can be applied to both fiction and lived experience. In this sense, the concept of hauntology offers a further way of accessing multiplicity; if the events of the past influence the future, the line becomes blurred between these distinct definitions of time.

4 Intra-textual presentations of multiplicity through form, focalisation and style

Having explored the text's potential genre and demographic along with its engagement with socio-political concerns, the discussion now turns to an analysis of the intra-textual features within the thesis, i.e.: how the text operates on the level of the page to convey the concepts described in the previous sections. As Eaglestone suggests, "Form describes not the content of a novel, but rather the ways in which a novel embodies or shapes that content, how a novel works." (2013, p. 7). Form is inseparable from story, as the way the story is conveyed is at the core of the story itself (2013). Exploration of the

text's form reveals how the text accesses multiplicity as a thematic underpinning by use of a range of structural and stylistic features.

The development of three distinct focalisations

Hill (2014) positions conventional YA fiction as a genre that tends to be written in the first person, implying a singular YA protagonist and thus allowing narrative style to position identity formation as an individualistic experience for adolescents. In support of this notion, this research project was initially proposed as a single focalisation narrative, revealed to the reader through the lens and experiences of a primary narrator / protagonist, Cam. However, the text's movement away from singular focalisation through its redrafting means that the text disrupts these conventional expectations of a YA text. The benefits of developing additional focalisations is explored in this section.

An analysis of Cam's focalisation explores the practical rationale that led to the development of additional narrators. As Cam's narrative voice developed into an extension of her character through the drafting process, it became clear that Cam views her world in a detail-focused manner that threatens to slow down the pace of the novel. This is in part due to her obsession with categorising external stimuli to keep events within her sphere of control. For example, after Cam and Melissa have an encounter that disturbs Cam's sense of identity, Cam removes herself from the situation and observes the swimming pool from a distance:

The water opened before me in perfect symmetry. Eight lanes were clearly demarcated by seven thick black lines, running parallel down the length of the pool. The lines appeared clear and strong, but when I strained my eyes to make out the exact edges, they blurred uncomfortably with the water's distortion.

Cam tends to narrate with evenly weighted sentences, especially early in the text. Her disembodied eye travels through the world in pursuit of orderly categorisation and measurement, even of her own body's functions. Cam's way of seeing involves meaning-making through detached observation rather than present, physical experiences, as though she is curating her own experiences. These aspects of Cam's narrative style could also offer a form of shrouded reference to the impact of her eating disorder on her psyche: a way in which her eating disorder is enacted on the sub-textual level.

Although this style has the potential for negative impact on reader flow, it was important to retain Cam's authenticity, as the way Cam focalises her narrative provides valuable information on the way Cam perceives her own physicality and engagement with the world, and invites the reader to investigate why Cam narrates the way that she does, and what this might mean for her identity. In a similar vein, a popular example of narrative style that takes the reader inside character psyches in this way is Mark Haddon's narrator, Christopher, from *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time*:

*I said that I liked things to be in a nice order. And one way of things being in a nice order was to be logical. Especially if those things were numbers or an argument. But there were other ways of putting things in a nice order. And that was why I had **Good Days** and **Black Days** (2004, pp. 66 - 67).*

Christopher's characterised style of focalisation allows Haddon to explore a voice that operates as an extension of psyche. Similarly, it was important to maintain the authenticity of Cam's voice and way of seeing to allow the space for this exploration, and to also leave the space for Cam's psyche to present itself and evolve on the page.

Introduction of Jacob and Melissa as narrators focalised in the third person

Despite the need to preserve Cam's authentic voice to convey her character and narrative trajectory, because of the factors described above regarding Cam's stilted style, it was important to develop additional perspectives that would drive narrative action. In the text's development, Jacob and Melissa initially began as strong secondary characters. I started to experiment with revealing the narrative through their focalisation in third person to explore how this might enhance the text's presentation of multiplicity as well as provide readers relief from Cam's clinical eye.

Jacob and Melissa's third person focalisations, which are by nature of their characters' psyches more expressive and tactile than Cam's, provide powerful contrast to Cam's self-repression and withdrawn relationship with the external world. Jacob and Melissa's third person narrations also offer the additional benefit of expositional space to comment on wider features of the text, such as setting, context, and Cam herself (from an external perspective). Using these contrasts in narrative style also offers internal and external perspectives of each character for the benefit of the reader.

Introducing Jacob and Melissa as narrators also elevated them to primary characters in the narrative, in turn enriching the text's complexity by introducing additional character arcs and conflicts. As each character owns the truth of a portion of the story, multiplicity overrides the familiarity and cliché of a singular protagonist and singular meaning of the story, as well as the notion of a singular character's 'hero's journey' and its attendant tropes. The use of three perspectives also disrupts a linear time sequence, further enhancing the complexity of the structure, as scenes are at times replayed from each character's viewpoint.

Ultimately, these aspects of form enrich the complexity and multiplicity of each character and story arc. The use of a complex tandem narrative structure also further contributes to the novel's liminality between YA and adult fiction; the form offers challenges to younger readers, but the subject matter is still presented through the perspectives of adolescent protagonists.

Cam's resultant unreliable first-person narration

In YA, first person narrative accounts tend towards the confessional and often form a relationship of trust and rapport with the reader, as well as serving as potential stand-ins for the reader; a canvas upon which to cast the readers' own psychology. The thesis consciously challenges this assumption, in part because of its introduction of multiple narrators, but also because of Cam's unreliability regarding her perception of herself and those around her. As Cam deliberately attempts to maintain distance from other characters and her own body throughout the text, despite escalations in the emotional conflict both within herself and for those around her, the reader becomes aware that her voice is a form of protection rather than an objective source of truth.

At times, Jacob and Melissa narrate shared experiences very differently to the way Cam narrates these events. For example, when Melissa walks with Cam after school early in the text, Cam tells the reader that:

"She is less talkative outside the classroom, which makes little sense to me. I find myself filling in her silences, an unexpected nerviness that I must disguise by making conversation."

However, in the next scene, Melissa proposes the exact opposite:

"Cam spoke so little while they walked that Melissa began to babble."

These discrepancies allow Cam's voice, and by extension, her self-constructed identity, seem more attuned to a proclaimed façade that the reader can explore.

Cam's role as an unreliable narrator becomes central to understanding the conflicts of her individual story. Her way of narrating is prescriptive as well descriptive, as the way she describes her own experiences informs the choices and actions she will make as a result, telling herself her own narrative. However, Cam's voice goes through a process of deconstruction in terms of its reliability as a source of truth for the reader, in turn illuminating her internally-driven conflict regarding her self-prescribed narrative. For example, after Cam runs on a cold winter day and comes home freezing, she is taken to the see a doctor by her sister. She shrouds the narration of her body weight as a potential contributing factor, and describes the visit as follows:

I have run many times at dawn without being taken to the doctor, "shivering", according to my sister... Next comes a tape measure held by a fleshy female nurse who holds her face in professional neutrality while she records the measurements. Her expression, along with the brusque doctor, tells me that there is nothing to be concerned about or surprised by.

In a scene following, Cam continues this reinforcement: "I am not cold. My sister has asked me that at least three times a day since we went to visit the doctor. I am not hungry, either." Cam's narrative voice is a mechanism through which she narrates herself based on what she would like to be believe or present about herself. The subjectivity of Cam's self-presentation invites the reader to investigate clues and make their own interpretations of Cam's psychology.

The multiplicity of perspective offered in the text means that the reliability of Cam's narration, or any indeed any form of narration, as a single source of truth, is increasingly called into question.

Subjective reader investment across three competing character arcs

The use of three narrators in a tandem narrative enhances linked character action and reaction, which is crucial for maintaining a sense of movement in a text where most of the conflict takes place in the psychological arena.

Because the narrative is shared between three voices, each with individual motivations, external conflicts, inner worlds, and identities, this tandem structure means

the reader will likely invest in each character's arc in subjective ways, meaning that any of these three characters could be viewed as the protagonist of the text by the reader. As multiplicity is an important theme in my text, I am comfortable with this subjectivity in each reader's empathetic investment between the three primary narrators. Subjective reader investment in a tandem narrative enables the thesis to explore and reinforce the notion that there can be more than one protagonist in a narrative without detracting from each of their roles as a primary character.

Methods of differentiating character voice

Because the text shifts in its focalisation from scene to scene, developing distinct and recognisable voices for each narrator was crucial to contribute to reader orientation in the correct character's focalisation, especially early in the text.. The inherent change in perspective when moving between first and third person is one practical method in which voice changes are signalled between scenes. Likewise, the pronouns 'I' for Cam in the first person and 'he' and 'she' for Jacob and Melissa in the third person become overt clues in focalisation. Naming characters early in each scene also places the reader in each character's eyes, working in a similar way to the filmic device of an establishing shot.

Conveying character beyond the level of the language was an important additional method of differentiation. Each protagonist is from the same age and possesses several lifestyle similarities, yet I wanted to show that experiences and ways of seeing and being can be highly subjective within this similar demographic, as this supports the text's overriding theme of multiplicity. As a result, I aimed to privilege a different primary sense for each character as an additional method of focalisation.

Cam and sight-based focalisation

Cam uses sight to 'colonise' her world and remain in control of her experiences. When she feels nervous before the first day of the school year, she describes the hallway leading to her History class:

If I stared down to the far wall at the opposite end of the hallway with my eyes slightly out of focus, the rows of lockers lining each wall seemed like they were encroaching on my presence and might topple over onto me. I stood and watched for a few moments before I walked towards our classroom.

As Cam encounters challenges and conflict to her identity through the text, we find that her use of sight changes and becomes more emotive to signify her changing relationship with expression and experience:

A sculpture leans into the harbour, hanging heavy on the edge of the waves. His eyes are closed while he leans in towards the gusting torrents with arms poised at his sides.

Sight therefore signifies a distinct focalisation for Cam as well as serving a character and narrative development function.

Jacob's auditory-based narration

Jacob uses sound / auditory devices as his primary mode of experience. He often signifies his loneliness by describing the emptiness of a room through the echoing sounds he hears when he is inside of it. Loud or distressing noises are used to signpost moments where his psychological state is under stress:

If he stood in this room for too long, he could hear Charlie's moaning, then the heavy weight of his body slamming against the bathroom tiles, and the crack of his head against the wall with repetitive thunks of seizure.

And:

He waited until Henry's howls change in pitch, from keen, strong notes to whimpering yodels, until they sounded more like crying. But Henry's howls echoed on in Jacob's head, like it was an empty room.

Melissa's physicality as primary mode of engagement

Melissa engages with her world through her physicality. She tends to be the first person in a scene to reach out and touch a person or an object, and she uses this sensory aspect to form connections. In the early stages of her friendship with Cam, Cam narrates the following: "I show Melissa the way back to her house. She reaches in and squeezes me tight around the middle before I can protest." An action-based primary sense also allows Melissa to propel the narrative forward.

Cam is hyper-aware of Melissa's physical interactions, whereas Melissa seems unaware of the impact of her physicality on her connections with others. After Melissa places her hand on Cam's knee in a History lesson, Cam tells us that "Melissa's hand was completely still on my knee, as though she had forgotten it was there." In this way, Melissa challenges Cam's relationship with her own physicality, which is crucial to Cam's evolving relationship with her body.

It could be argued that Melissa comes into conflict with Dan in part because he continuously challenges her agency over how she engages with the world through her physicality. Melissa often describes Dan's impositions on her body in this way: "On the drive back from the movies, Dan kept one hand on the wheel and one hand on Melissa's thigh, inching further and further to the hemline of her skirt. She batted it away."

This aspect of the text again highlights the centrality of physicality as part of Melissa's experience of the world, and in turn, her focalisation.

Development of incidental dialogue / characters to enrich the believability of the narrative world and further support multiplicity

It could be argued that this draft creative text could be revised to include a greater level of overt exposition of place and space, perhaps by way of introducing minor characters and increasing the level incidental dialogue / exchanges between characters. The idea that shrouding meaning in incidental exchanges improves narrative flow is based on Roman Jakobson's six functions of language, particularly the phatic function, in which incidental dialogue is understood as a way to normalise a text and keep lines of exchange open between characters (Fry, 2009).

Minor characters and incidental dialogue do indeed contribute to the 'suspension of disbelief' for a social realist text. However, this feature of a social realist text could be argued as a contradiction to tendencies of the YA genre, in which it is more common for young protagonists to experience the narrative in relative isolation using less nuanced dialogue than an adult character would, perhaps due to the characterised way in which an adolescent protagonists tend towards more intense experiences or outbursts of emotion.

It is also true that different readers respond to different aspects of language in subjective ways, meaning that the phatic code is not necessarily affective for all texts or their readers. In a 2017 study conducted in Norway, two groups of undergraduate

university readers were provided with two versions of Katherine Mansfield's *The Fly* (Kuzmicova). One version was the original literary text, in which Mansfield mediates character emotions through the lens of small talk and mundane actions (which draws parallels to the phatic code described by Jakobson). The other version was a rewritten 'suspense fiction' adaptation intended for young adults, in which figurative expressions were replaced by more literal interpretations. The results of the study found that the non-literary version elicited a large frequency of first-person empathetic responses to the text (Kuzmicova, 2017). While not conclusive or all-encompassing as a statement on literary style and affect, this study supports the idea that encoding emotion in phatic devices is not inherently linked or crucial to developing readers' empathetic investment in a text.

Although principles of the phatic function were useful in revising some dialogical exchanges, I wanted to maintain a sense of intensity of exchange in the way these characters relate in the text (a popular convention in YA texts). Introducing minor characters or a great degree of incidental dialogue could dilute or divert reader attention from the subtle conflict escalation of the text. This decision was also influenced by the already complex textual structure of this tandem narrative, which already challenges reader accessibility.

Conclusion on the positive impact of multiple focalisations

This text focalises the experiences three equally crucial characters, at times replaying the same scenes from multiple angles to demonstrate how perspective can skew perception of events, and even drive their meaning. This in turn demonstrates that meaning-making can be highly subjective for characters (just as it can be for readers of a text). Multiplicity of style and focalisation supports multiplicity as a carrying theme of the plot. Use of multiple narrative perspectives also allows primary characters to co-exist. The use of multiplicity in this way also calls to mind hauntological aspects of the text, where the present is replayed through the perspectives of multiple characters and supports highly subjective and multiple linearities in this text. Fluid focalisation is a method of expanding identity in this text, as by representing character from multiple perspectives, identity is increasingly revealed as a rapidly changing entity for these characters, as well as for those around them, who are in a similar state of flux.

5 Narrative devices, imagery, and symbolism

As well as in its structure and form, the text conveys itself the reader through a variety of images and symbols that support that text's thematic underpinnings. These devices will be explored in this section. The imagery and symbolism being explored in the creative thesis and discussed in this section could be defined as a conscious form of image or symbol making on the part of characters as a way of understanding or relating their experiences (Stokes, 2019).

Specific and evolving uses of symbols and images that recur through the text play a key role in inhabiting characters' psychological conflicts outside of the physical world, in turn signalling characters' evolving relationships and identities. This mimetic method of conveying meaning is key to fictional storytelling, as conscious image-making is part of what conveys the story to the reader as a creative text (Stokes, 2019). Symbolism and imagery therefore operate as narrative functions that impact on the reader's perception of character development outside of diegetic devices.

Differentiating between how symbols and images are used in this text is also useful for the discussion. The main difference between the two devices is terminological. Imagery in this text tends to be shared across focalisations due to each image's strong underpinnings in the concept of liminality and multiplicity as an overriding textual theme (e.g. characters' engagement with water as an intermediary medium, setting as a place of transition / evolution and liminal reflections on identity while transitioning from states of wakefulness to sleep, and vice versa).

The thesis' use of symbolism tends to be more specific to individual characters. Developing specific symbols to represent the conflict faced by Cam, Jacob, and Melissa became a way of personalising each character's narrative style as well as their individual experiences and revelations within the shared conflict escalation of the text (in which characters rely in action and reaction in scenes narrated by other characters to drive their own story forward). Moments of change or revelation for characters are therefore signposted through characters' changing relationships with established images and symbols through the text.

Recurring images across all story arcs / focalisations

Characters' relationship to water

As a medium, water is a place of flux and liminality between air and solid ground, and it changes shape in relation to forces imposed on it. In this text, water is therefore a key image to reflect the rapidly changing adolescent psychologies of these protagonists, as a space of multiplicity and transition between two distinct mediums. Water becomes a meditative aspect: a point at which characters assess their emotional states in reaction to new experiences. Cam, Jacob and Melissa each explore images of floating, swimming, drowning, or looking into bodies of water from the shore, whether through imagination or lived experience.

Swimming and its associated water imagery are key signals of Cam's evolving relationship with her physicality and identity. Cam often spends time near the water to consider her previously held beliefs or evolving connections to others in the text. After she spends a night away with Melissa and experiences what we, as readers, assume is one of her first intense moments of physical connection with Melissa, Cam swims alone the next morning:

I refuse to slow my pace at the cold winter water lapping against my toes, calves, thighs, stomach, ribcage, shoulders. Before I can hesitate, I am immersed up to my neck in the waves, the water more shocking and yet more natural than standing in the sun. I stay still for several seconds and feel it against my skin before I dive beneath the surface.

This passage allows the reader insight into a moment of transition, in which Cam accepts her body as more than a place of self-imposed restriction.

Jacob also expresses moments of liminality in his identity and psychology through his connection to water. After he has betrayed Cam's trust and is beginning to accept Charlie's disappearance, Jacob swims out far into the ocean with Henry:

Out from the shore, Jacob dipped his head beneath the surface and opened his eyes. He saw Henry's four paws scrabbling through the water beside him in a thick white cloud. His own body felt serpentine and fluid: a pale, slimy eel in an endless ocean. He flicked his limbs and propelled his body further away from the land.

Melissa also engages with water imagery during moments of conflict in her narrative.

The best part about swimming was diving in headfirst and dry, feeling the slap of the water on her collarbones and then the cool shock of total immersion beneath the surface, where she disappeared for a while, holding her breath until she was ready to re-emerge as a thrashing, powerful body on the surface.

As with this example, Melissa's narration of swimming sometimes contains imagery associated with concealment or masking, as is typical of her preoccupations regarding the aspects of her identity she selectively reveals.

Exploration of liminal spaces via the boundary between consciousness and sleep

Characters in their beds or awake when they should be asleep signpost moments of exploration of liminal spaces, and in turn the liminal spaces of their identities. Cam and Melissa often think of their growing connections to each other when lying awake in bed.

Later that night in bed, arms pinned neatly to my sides, I swam past the spinning edge of the vodka and thought about the expression on Melissa's face as I had walked away... I replayed her face again and again and it made less sense each time... I woke up the next morning with my duvet askew and arms wrapped around myself in a warm ball.

Melissa's narration of her changing connection to Cam also takes place in the liminal boundary between wakefulness and dreams:

Melissa could hear Dylan snoring from his bedroom, and it was impossible to sleep again. Her limbs were still flitting through the water, reimagining their first swimming practice.... When sleep finally came, Melissa had strange dreams of swimming around in a fishbowl with Cam, watched on by Dan and Genevieve, their disapproving looks making her feel naked behind the curved glass.

Likewise, Jacob often reveals his changing perceptions of Charlie's behaviours and Cam's connection to Melissa when the house is empty and dark. After a perceived rebuff from Cam, "Jacob thought of black and white things over and over until they turned grey and he drifted to sleep."

Wakefulness during usual times of sleep for these characters tends to signify their changing relationship to their concealed inner worlds. This recalls the

hauntological aspect to the text, in the sense that the moments before / during / immediately after sleep can run together and blur the boundary between imagined and real experience in the way characters retell their memories to themselves.

Character-specific symbols and imagery: Cam

As an unreliable narrator, Cam's character development more frequently plays out on the level on the image / symbol rather than through overt diegetic action. Early in the text, Cam's imagery tends to alternate between two oppositional themes or ideas as binaries. Cam's evolving relationship to this binarised thinking in favour of multiplicity is reflected through her more complex engagement with these symbols as she moves through the text.

Use of present tense to signal moments of revelation

Before moving into an analysis of specific symbols, it is important to note that the evolution of Cam's character is sometimes signposted by shifts in her narrative style. For much of the narrative, Cam speaks from a removed perspective in the past tense, as though she is outside of herself, or viewing her body from above in an omniscient perspective. To signal key moments of change, tension or revelation for Cam, present tense is used to draw the reader into a sense of immediacy. For example, close to the end of the text, when Cam considers how her identity is changing, perhaps for the better:

The wind grows in ferocity, trying to change my direction and send me back where I came from. I resist. I put each foot on the ground in front of me, half of my stride blown backwards each time. I am so close to the water's edge.

The use of present tense increases throughout the text as Cam's story arc moves towards increased connection to others, including Melissa.

Running and physical motion

Cam's relationship to running is a key symbol to show her intensifying relationship with her body. We meet Cam in the act of running in the first scene of the novel, and she revisits running periodically throughout the text. While swimming tends to point towards changes in Cam's identity that she may eventually embrace, running often

serves as a space of retreat or escape from potential change, as a fear-based symbol.

Early in the text, running is associated with finding safety through numbness:

I run until my lips and cheeks seem to pulsate with heat and my legs grow stronger with each extra minute. I burst through the first pain barrier and glide to the second, before I break into the ideal equilibrium of numbness.

The imagery associated with running and Cam's body in motion intensifies in accordance with her growing emotional conflict regarding her connection to Melissa and her body issues. At times, the text suggests use of running as a form of self-harm or erosion of the body instead of an act of strength:

The air is ice around my body, shards that break against my skin with each step forward. Or perhaps they are small needles, pricking me to see if they can draw blood.

The image of running is another way in which Cam's eating disorder plays out on the symbolic level, with frequent evocations of numbness or pain during the act of running as a counter to the feelings of embodiment that Cam experiences when she connects with Melissa. The duality of these images demonstrates the multiplicity and contradiction Cam feels regarding her relationship with her body.

The colour white

Imagery associated with the colour white also exemplifies how Cam's eating disorder plays out on a symbolic level rather than through diegetic statement or action. In binarised terms, Cam associates the colour white with flawlessness and perfection: a concept that she uses to remain invisible to herself and others, as white is essentially a blank sheet.

I risk a furtive glance in the mirror and see a glowing illusion glaring back at me. My ribcage is white as the bones beneath my skin... I stare and stare and the image in the mirror becomes whiter and whiter until I drift into a bright daydream of myself.

However, in the same description Cam describes her ribcage as follows:

It reminds me of painted birdcage left outside at the mercy of the elements. Over the years the cage will decay naturally, eroding the luminous, artificial paint.

This signals to the reader that Cam is exploring and challenging her notions of perfectionism, allowing her battle to play out on a symbolic level rather than through overt textual discussions and didactic enactments in the plot.

The cage

The image of the cage is used in conjunction with the colour white in the text. However, while the colour white focuses on the notion of perfectionism as of purity, the cage positions perfectionism as a place of confinement. Cam grapples with the image of the cage throughout the text as a place through which to explore her self-imposed restriction of her identity and body. While undergoing challenges to her self-perception during meetings with Louise, Cam describes the cage as follows:

My cage is for birds, not some cruel human contraption. It houses me comfortably, and my wings can stretch to full span. The thought of using them to fly barely occurs to me.... On windy nights the cage creaks, and when it rains, its bars weaken with brown rust, making way for my body to fit through the gap into the world. If I wish it.... The cage holds me safe from intruders... Outside of the cage, I would be just like any other bird, flying endlessly with no hope of sanctuary.

This description of the cage highlights the duality of the image: to exist outside of the cage would mean freedom, but also danger. The final denouement of the text uses the image of the cage to offer a resolution of these values, again, demonstrating how Cam's evolving identity plays out on the symbolic level.

Something bold stirred inside of me, like wings spreading at the open door of a cage, poised to take flight.

Character-specific symbols and imagery: Jacob

Exposition through allegory / story symbolism

In addition to blurring the boundary between the past and present by hauntological narrations of Charlie, Jacob often uses allegory to access his emotions rather than overtly sharing his thoughts and feelings on Charlie's disappearance his resultant loneliness. An example of this is Jacob's description of the town of Colma:

There is a town just outside of California called Colma, that serves as a mass graveyard. Hundreds of thousands of graves in row after unmoving row, holes in the ground filled with unseeing bodies, flesh giving up and falling away from off-white, withering bones. It is known as a is a 'necropolis'. Less than 2,000 of

the living reside in Colma, and grave sites outnumber the living at approximately 1,000 to 1.

This example also recalls the morbidity of Jacob's underlying trauma, hinting that he believes Charlie could be dead instead of missing, and in turn highlighting his preference for escapism through his thoughts rather than confronting his perceived truths.

The way Cam responds to Jacob's allegorical storytelling, and how this evolves based on context of their friendship at various points in the text, is a further example of how Jacob's allegorical storytelling conveys character conflict and development. It is also true that Jacob's allegories offer residual benefit to Cam in her exploration and conflict with the liminal spaces that Jacob exposes, as with this example, which Jacob tells Cam about when she is beginning to question the validity of her feelings for Melissa, and her ability to act on them:

He continued his story. "If you wanted some land, you had to line up on perimeter and wait for the sound of a cannon at noon. When it went off, you could run into the unassigned land until you found a bit you liked, claim it, and stay there."

I wondered how I would fare in a land grab. I was a good runner, but once I claimed my patch I would most likely defend it poorly, giving up edges to my neighbours without protest until all that remained was the direct ground I was standing on.

Hobsonville is also the ideal allegorical setting for Jacob's fascination with repeated history to play out. Jacob's explorations of Hobsonville on foot allow him to access in an immediately relevant local history of masculinity (in terms of aviation and naval exploration). He then uses macrocosmic patterns he finds in Hobsonville, and the wider history of the country and the world, to understand his microcosm:

Jacob looked out at the houses. "This place used to be a defence base during World War One. The government built a whole lot of little houses for the recruits, the old ones, like mine... eventually all the fighting was over, and this place didn't matter anymore.

In this example, there are parallels to Jacob's relationships with his father and Charlie, where violence is the main instigator of action or importance. Jacob's fascination with traditional ideals of masculinity in detached examples from history is a zone in which

he plays out the trauma of his individual family experiences, making sense of his inner world through allegory.

Henry

Jacob's relationship to Henry exists symbolically as well as physically. Jacob's perception of Henry signified the vulnerabilities and need for care that Jacob is seeking for himself, but struggles to explore in the context of the masculinised independence that pervades his home life and early identity development.

Henry headed to his bowl first, and after realising it was still empty, lumbered over to Jacob to remind him, brushing against his legs like an engorged cat. He needed a wash. Jacob filled Henry's bowl first and then swung the pantry doors open to see what he could conjure up tonight.

In this sense Henry is also an example of the use of an objective correlative because his character carries metaphorical story weight. This example also shows hunger as an additional image / metaphor in Jacob's narration. Hunger for Jacob convey a sense of lack which develops literally as he begins to run out of money, and symbolically, the further his distance from Cam grows. At the end of one of the scenes narrated by Jacob, "He picked up his backpack and left the house to meet Cam, hoping she would bring breakfast this morning." At the very start of Cam's next scene, she says "I did not like to eat breakfast, and there was nothing unusual about that."

Jacob's narration of hunger is at times linked to Cam's own relationship with food, enabling their friendship to remain intact on the symbolic level despite changes in their evolving identities.

Character-specific symbols and imagery: Melissa

Images of masking and mirroring are key to understanding Melissa's complex and changing relationship with the performativity and authenticity of her identity at different stages of the text. Melissa's character development is driven by the conflicts between her external, broadcasted self, and the authentic self that she conceals.

Melissa exists on two levels in this text. One level is the externalised self she broadcasts to the world, which is largely performative and based on learned behaviours and patterns in social performativity that gain acceptance of her identity from her

frequent transitions between schools. Because this self is externalised by Melissa, other characters initially perceive this identity as Melissa's authentic personality. However, the more blatantly that Melissa broadcasts this external identity, the more we may begin to sense, as readers, that this identity is like a mask that diverts from her own and others' examination of her secondary inner level. Melissa also frequently 'practices' her expressions before she performs them, or self-consciously infers each expression she is attempting to convey to the reader, evoking the idea of a mask or performance.

Imagery associated with masking and mirroring recurs through Melissa's narration to demonstrate her changing and complex relationship with her performed and internalised identities. For example, when Melissa shares a cabin with Cam during their swimming squad's inter-school competition, she experiences a moment of tension regarding her identity, and reveals this through mirror imagery: "Melissa looked back at herself in the mirror and thought her face looked strange in reverse, all the recognisable features flipped back to front." Similarly, after Cam disappears on the last morning of the competition:

Melissa pulled faces at herself in the mirror while she attempted to comb her hair. Her face looked round and child-like. She contorted her features until she found the perfect expression, cold determination and focus.... She plastered it on as she strode out of the cabin.

6 Conclusion

Multiplicity is a key feature of this creative thesis, demonstrated both by the ambiguity of the text's potential genre and demographic and the growing and evolving identities of each of the YA protagonists in the thesis. Rather than arriving at 'closed-circuit' resolutions of identity, this thesis advocates for multiple definitions and understandings; Cam, Jacob and Melissa arrive at a more complex relationship with their evolving identities at the conclusion of the text than they may have understood at the beginning, as does the reader. The text in this sense retains the authentic complexity of these YA protagonists' psychologies and experiences in their contemporary world, allowing the text to unfold in a liminal space between modern YA and realist fiction for adults.

From a personal perspective, this text began to formulate itself many years ago, beyond my knowledge at the time, when I was a student of high school age myself. As an avid reader, I looked incessantly to YA, adult fiction, and a vast array of other books in school and public libraries, seeking texts that would resonate with my personal experiences. Though I could relate to many of the texts that I found on the shelves, as a lot of young people do, I found that the majority of characters, despite experiencing and overcoming difficult challenges and emotions, still felt somehow 'unlike' me. The 'me' in this sense, was a young person with an undiagnosed eating disorder, who had also not yet come to terms with the fact that I was not straight. The thesis perhaps enacts these experiences in a metonymic sense, housing similar emotions within its characters and placing the text alongside my own identity rather than directly within it.

Although fiction continues to evolve towards inclusivity and diversity, especially over the past decade, this text may fill a gap on the shelf for young people still experiencing a limited number of diverse and multi-faceted representations of their identities. While this rationale could suggest that the text is in fact, aimed at a YA readership exclusively, the very nature of the text's intent for multiplicity and diversity in its structure and focalisation means that the resultant text will likely appeal to both a YA audience as well as any other reader that finds emotional truth in the narrative. The text's location in a genre or demographic is left to the choice of the reader, in much the same way that the reader is invited to form their own individual experiences of the characters, thematic undertones and subject matter. In this way, the text is illustrative of

the potential experience of contemporary adolescence rather than instructive. The text places interpretive agency with the reader, understanding and encouraging their powerful ability to make manifold meanings of a text.

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